

I cannot remember my father well. I only have a faded picture of him in my mind. He stayed on the mines for long periods. We never saw him much. All the cattle, sheep and goats he had, he bought with the money he earned down in the mines of Johannesburg, where the walls were singing.

His life remained vague to me and filled with rumour - that he belonged to gangs in Johannesburg, that he was a cycling champion out there, that he was a good man and a rebel. All I remember is his shambok and his horse's gallop. Though I can't remember what I had done wrong I can still recall all those days when he was chasing me on horseback: to kill me, I thought.

People in the neighbourhood used to stare at us in sheer amazement. On many occasions they must have thought it was all over with me. But I was clever for I used to make sure I ran towards places where it was impossible for a horse to go. It was then too much of a bother for my father to climb off his horse to chase me. Of course he also knew that when it came to running his son was equipped with a jet-engine. Resigned to such facts, he used to climb off his horse then, pick up a couple of stones and throw them at the horizon.

I remember one time when he actually dived at me from his moving horse and got me. That day he bruised me badly with his shambok. Fortunately I managed to slip from his grip and run for my dear life. I hid somewhere inside a Mission garden. He went around looking for me, shouting that it was all over, he was not going to beat me up any more, so I must come out from wherever I was hiding. I never stirred. I only came out after I was sure he had gone. I saw him moving homeward and I came out of my hiding place and used only secret footpaths on my way back home. Then I waited, like always, until the call of the brandy compelled him to go to his drinking sprees; then I would quietly go home.

My mother would always stand outside waiting for me, staring in the direction I had run. I was also scared of her as she was a bit like my father as far as beatings were concerned. She saw me coming that night and called my name.

I didn't trust her much. I went to her wearily after studying her face closely. To my surprise her eyes were full of tears. She looked over my wounds: I was blue with shambok marks. She boiled some water to clean me and soothe the pain. Before long, my father returned to check if I was back already. My mother was furious, she was mad. She started shouting at him, asking him why he always made his children into the area's laughing stock and why did he treat us the way he did.

That is how they used to be: he used to explode on us and hold us responsible for his harsh life, of which we knew nothing. He and our mother would never stop quarrelling but my father never beat her. Anyway, that night I was in pain. It got really bad. I cried during the night. My father woke up, made up the fire and boiled some water to soothe my sores.

From then on, my health deteriorated. For some mysterious reason, after the beating I became a very sickly child. I couldn't keep anything in my stomach. My stomach was running for a long time.

I was consumed by pain all over my body and spent most of my time doubled-up and vomiting-out whatever I was given to eat or drink. My elders felt scared so they took me to a traditional Medicine- Man. He revealed to them the cause of my illness. They understood his words but I was never told anything. All I can still remember is that my mother

brewed a lot of traditional beer for a ceremony. My father slaughtered a goat and apologised to the ancestors asking them to restore my health. I was not given any herbs or medication. People gathered for the ceremony and enjoyed the meat and drank the beer; the ancestors accepted the apologies and I had my health restored.

One day, my brother and I were at home with our mother, sitting around and talking. My father was back from the mines and had gone out drinking. When he came back, he burst through the entrance of the hut drunk, waving his shambok. After an exchange of words, he started whipping us with the shambok.

He scattered us out of the hut and all over the fields. In fact we made it out because our mother dived at him and wrested away the shambok for a short time. My father didn't sleep at home that night.

My mother woke us up in the morning. She washed and dressed us, packed our clothes and gave each one of us a piece of luggage to carry. I didn't know where we were going. She was silent, speechless, she told us nothing. She ordered us to walk. We walked and walked for a very long distance. I got very tired, my mother carried me on her back. We came to a railway-coach stop. A bus drove by, so full of migrant people coming home that there was no space left for us. We walked on until it got dark.

We came to a house with many dogs. My mother asked for a place to sleep. The people of the house were very hospitable. They gave us shelter and before we slept even gave us a dishful of boiled dry mielies. We didn't eat much out of the dish, the corn was dry and wasn't very palatable to say the least. The woman of the house asked my mother why we ate so little, to which she replied that her children were not used to eating dry food.

I slept early because I was tired but I woke up in torment, I couldn't get much peace in sleep, the dogs kept on barking. Some people went past the house. The man of the house went out and talked to them. I ended up sitting. Both the night and my mind were restless.

Early in the morning my mother thanked the people of the house for their kindness and off we went. This time we got the bus to Port St Johns. When we got there it was late again and we missed the only bus going our way. We ended up sleeping at some place called Khayeni, where we could also get something to eat. In the morning we woke up and had some porridge for breakfast. I could hold down nothing of this breakfast. My mother gave me some water to drink and to wash my face with. We took a bus and dropped off at the Mngazi River.

We walked for about a mile. We reached a house. There was an old woman standing outside looking at us. She was our grandmother. Everything there seemed so warm and so different from the house we had slept in the first night. She killed a cock and we ate a meaty meal for a change. I enjoyed a very peaceful sleep. By the next day all the extended family from my mother's side started arriving to welcome us. They were all so happy to see us. We soon became friends with the children next door and played with them. They took us to the beach and taught us how to swim. We went fishing and bird hunting. The distance from my granny's place to the beach was only a mile and a half.

We spent a very happy time at my grandmother's house. A goat was slaughtered for us. We forgot about the hunger way back home at Flagstaff, at Bhalasi area. If I'm not mistaken we stayed there for three weeks.

I remember, one day we had gone to the beach as usual; the sun was very hot and I got very tired, so I returned home and fell asleep. It could only have been late morning. When I woke up I couldn't believe my eyes. My father was right there in front of me. He asked me what I was doing there and he asked why I left the sheep and goats alone way back home. I got very scared and forced my way out of the house and ran to where my granny was.

I told her that my father has arrived with his long shambok on horseback. I told her I was very scared because he might beat us again. My granny told me to take it easy since my father had not come to hit us, but he was visiting. My uncles came in to see him. Every member of the family came. They sat there and talked, my mother reporting everything he had done to us. He was given a warning by my uncles and promised not to misbehave again. We stayed for three more weeks which made a total of

six weeks. On the last week a goat was slaughtered and we were given some meat for the road. We wore new clothes that granny had bought for us. Real gentlemen we were! I was even wearing a bowtie.

On the way back I nearly drowned in a river. My brother and I were on horseback and our parents on foot. When we crossed a river the horse jumped over and we fell into the water. I was helpless since I couldn't swim well, I was still very young. My father took some time to come to my rescue. In the end he managed to pull me out of the water, took off my clothes and gave me a new suit to wear. I had a lot of clothes those days. We slept by my aunt's house (my father's sister). The next day we were home at Flagstaff at Siphageni. The next door neighbour had taken care of all our livestock, Mr Phungula by name. I went straight to my friend to tell him about my stay at Port St Johns and the new friends I had met there.

We had a relatively peaceful stay at home during the first few days. However, as time went on he started being rude, scolding us for almost nothing. One day I really got mad and decided to tell him off. I said to him, "Look here Dad, you are starting with your flings now, you scold us for nothing, you want to beat us up for nothing. We are going to leave you alone with your house and livestock and go to granny's house again. We'll never come back here again. Don't forget granny and my uncles are very strong. They will beat you up to nobody's business."

He just looked at me and laughed. From then on he never gave us trouble.